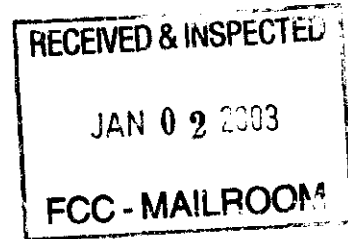


02-277

C. CHRISTOPHER ADELMANN

12/21/02

Confirmed  
JAN 9 2003  
Distribution Center



To:

Mr. Michael Powell, FCC  
Mr. Michael J Copps, FCC  
Mr. David Solomon, FCC 445 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Washington, DC 20554  
Director Thomas Ridge, Homeland Security, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
NW, Washington, DC 20500  
Senator Joseph Lieberman, Connecticut,  
Senator Barbara Boxer, CA, 112 Hard Bldg, Wash, DC 20510  
Mr. Tunka Varadarajan, Wall Street Journal, 200 Liberty, NY 10281  
LA Times, Letters to the Editor, Neil Gabler, 202 W. 1<sup>st</sup>, LA 90012

Gentlemen/Ladies:

For your consideration/publications, I attach the enclosed essay which I have written on the FCC's proposal to allow further consolidation of media interests in the United States. I believe that not only are these institutions in breach of their license obligations but also acting in a way that runs contrary to the spirit and purpose of our Homeland Security initiatives.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss any of your thoughts and/or responses to these opinions.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Chris Adelman  
[CADEL18707@aol.com](mailto:CADEL18707@aol.com)  
1023 Bienvenida Avenue  
Pacific Palisades, CA 90272

## **Homeland Security and Thee FCC's Push to Allow Further Media Consolidation**

**By Chris Adelman 12/10/02**

As America gears up protect itself, its citizens and its borders via increased homeland security, I am surprised to see the government's neglect at perhaps one of our most important national defenses: an informed public. We live in a world where information is the global currency and the resource that often separates advancement, winning, and success from regression or failure. Look at the way the civilized world relies on it and how the third world suffers from lack of information and education. Companies and the military, respectively, succeed because of advanced information and intelligence gathering and interpretation. An informed public becomes an integral part of government and the election process, thus raising overall levels of expectations, responsibility, dialogue and performance. An informed public creates a more focused "front-line" defense for any attempted breach on our democracy, be it physical or philosophical. So, while the great minds representing our citizens have vigorously debated our security and the President and the Congress have approved the Homeland Security Act, they are surprisingly allowing the pro-broadcasting consolidation proposal of the FCC to take a potentially anti-security position.

The FCC's role is not to be a censor or be an adjudicator of taste or quality. It's solemn role to uphold the first amendment and the right of free speech should never be questioned. And, if the large media companies and their broadcast interests were in compliance of their obligations, it would be upholding its anointed role by acting as a moderator and decision maker in the consolidation debate among media experts, economists and other interested parties to discuss such issues as concentration of media, economic impact on consumers,

But media companies are violating an FCC doctrine which states that broadcasters, 'as public trustees, may not willfully distort the news.' The FCC needs to have its Enforcement Bureau uphold its Mission Statement to 'protect consumers and further public safety.' Broadcasters must not be allowed to further their positions until they have made changes. The impact of the current breach of their responsibilities as broadcast license holders is too serious to be allowed to continue. They are creating a misinformed public, thus deterring our homeland security efforts.

Fresh from the Chandra Levy media mob fest, an alarming number of the television and radio news and information media showed an embarrassing transparency of ineptitude on any level other than that of the direct reporting immediately after 9/11 of the obvious and the immediate. While we have lived in stable and prosperous times, there has been an evolution going on in broadcast television and radio news and information. News and information has been allowed to become "programming", often now at the controls of dramatic programming heads, not news people, who face a number of formidable business challenges:

- Increased competition; cable television, increased broadcasting networks and the Internet have exploded and there are options galore for consumers to get their news and information. Television and radio must fight tooth and nail to get ratings that ultimately determine advertising rates. As a consequence, programming must distinguish itself. This route has taken generally the “grab the audience” strategy, not one of improving quality.
- Increased shelf space; besides competition, this growth in outlets for news and information creates more time for the large media companies to fill. Everyday the television and radio audience must have something to consume. Shows may never say “no change in the status of the situation” or “nothing happened today.”

A solution long used by media companies to fill this increased broadcasting demand is to rerun programming across their multiple shows and distribution points. This strategy though, does not produce any incentive at the front end of content production to increase its quality. With escalating production costs and reduced advertising revenues due to the fragmentation of outlets today, programming becomes more and more about the cheaper to produce talk, information and entertainment show with moderators who must find ways to get the attention of the audience. Some do it with quality, with insight, with research, with compelling debate, but many more use the techniques developed by entertainment programmers. Because of this industry evolution, a number of troubling traits of television news and information programming have become evident. The question, which the FCC, its experts and an informed public must openly address, is how to remedy the distortion of the news by these new traits and techniques:

**Today's News Shows Need Conflict:** Because of a desire to create drama and perhaps an inability to deal with grey areas, interpretative areas or evolving situations, many television news and information shows use a popular technique: have two dissenting, polar views and let the program become a dramatic argument, rather than an exchange of ideas. Often the louder and more heated the better--so the audience understands that there is a conflict going on. And if it became a debate of ideas, the moderator is almost always sure to try to keep stirring it up with a return to polarity of arguments. This need for conflict vs. the exchange of ideas simplifies the complexities of issues into black hats and white hats and ideas.

### **Sound Bytes**

Only half ideas, half thoughts and perhaps half truths are allowed because time is the precious commodity, impact is a close second--so if it can't be said it under 30 seconds, alter the facts, cut out the speculation, destroy the subtlety, package and, if necessary, spin reality. There can no longer be grey areas or issues that require reflection. This is not only because of the nature of the medium but also to get the attention of an audience that is perceived to be unable or not interested in anything else. Everyday Americans go to work, juggle complicated lives and issues. So why does television and radio news programming have a need to condescend to its audience?

A grave consequence of this is that the medium becomes the message and public officials, political candidates, and others must play the game and reduce their thoughts, debates and issues to fit the media's perceived preferred way to interest the audience. The dumbing down of news information and its packaging not only impact its quality but also its accuracy.

**Exploit, Interrupt and Criticize the Experts:** News shows love to have experts on their shows to give the show more credibility. But moderators then try to "knock these experts down to size" by interrupting them, belittling them, and often downright disagreeing with them. This only serves to make reporters and moderators, with clearly the home court advantage of control of the microphone and the dialogue seem incisive, probing and in control of the facts. I don't believe that those who talk the most and the loudest should be considered correct by default. But this desire to control the agenda of a show and as much as the information disseminated as possible is a strategy to make the broadcaster the center of the show, not the information. It also becomes a cost saving device. In-depth research and presentation is more expensive than a good talker. To the media companies, good information is ubiquitous, so programming differentiation relies on the abilities of the broadcaster to become the product, at the expense of information and news.

A recent interview of the west coast head of the coast guard overseeing the security of the port of Los Angeles by a reporter whose show Tunka Varadarajan of the Wall Street Journal reviewed, calling the reporter "windswept, inept, unprepared, verbose and incapable of complex analysis" turned into a perfect case of the "exploit, interrupt and criticize" the expert by the reporter. The coast guard head, trying to explain the current state of security of the port and anticipated measures, was heard to say on more than one occasion "as I was trying to say," "if I may finish" in hopes of actually providing information rather than being a support to someone's sound byte agenda. The President of this reporter's network responded to the criticism of this reporter by the Wall Street Journal's critic by saying this reporter was "tenacious and instinctive." I would add "agenda driven, looking to create stories, relying on the interrupt and attempt to cover up a lack of knowledge with a strong offense." One might also add, "distort the news."

### **Over Dramatization**

Many Broadcast news and information programs feel a need to use their vast dramatization and production techniques and capabilities to "enhance their programming." But some of the below techniques actually distorting the news:

**Background Music:** I find it particularly disturbing that television news and information shows find it necessary to put John Williamesque "Jaws" music behind new footage of, say, the Taliban, or 'what 'Al Queda might do next' or play dirges behind a tragic funeral. Do they think that they have desensitized viewers too much? Are these dramatic programmers trying to improve the production values? Music is a powerful tool; people have been inspired to march to war because of it or even fallen in love.

**Graphics:** A major news group recently put a sniper's bullseye over a map of America on its Internet site to emphasize a recent heightened terrorist alert. Is this a 'catchy' graphic, is it news or is it a dramatization that only serves to further frighten an American public in an irresponsible and distorted way?

### **Speculation**

What better way to keep your audience coming back for more than to create speculation as to what else could happen, what may be on the minds or plans of terrorists or what other fears Americans should have. Is this responsible journalism or a ratings hungry entity trying to use the dramatic storytelling technique of "what's next, what could be worse" at the expense of the sanity and wellbeing of the American public. Clearly, there were more terrorist ideas thrown around on the three broadcast networks by reporters than have probably ever been imagined in the dark alleys of terrorists and this raises the question of the responsibility and distortion of the news.

The problem with dramatization and speculation is that it has become part and parcel to the news. Much to the surprise of many in the media, there is still a great amount of public trust and goodwill towards what people see and hear on the news (although this is clearly waning). As written by Neil Gabler in his L.A. Times article, entitled "In Hannibal Country" and in Barry Glaswer's book, entitled "The Culture of Fear," this lack of responsible journalism has helped lead to a growing cultural phenomena of fear and distrust, started long before the tragic events of 9/11. So the more the news and information media have to fill their every increasing outlets with programming, the more it becomes incumbent in their strategy to get the attention of audiences at any cost.

And conversely, with the talking head as the focus, there is an alarming amount of news disseminated in which the anchors feel it necessary to not get too serious and joke around while discussing murder, significant political issues and world events. Again, 'willfully distorting the news?'

And where does this all end? We all know of the accusations that one overzealous reporter in Afghanistan was not at a location or witness to a series of events that occurred as he stated -shades of the movie *Broadcast News*. Worse still, when does the entire the news and information media feel the need to get a point or a programming agenda across to attract viewers so much more important than accurate reporting and first rate commentary and analysis that most Americans become suspect of all sources of news and information? Or worse, when do we not know the difference between what is accurate and what is not?

The large media companies have a huge seat at the table in our lives, presenting us 24 hours a day, seven days a week with information and news of our world and its current and evolving realities. But unlike other institutions of democratic responsibility, such as the branches of the Federal government, they have not had the benefit of the insight of our forefathers to create a proper system of checks and balances as they have grown. Faced with the current challenges and cultural changes outlined above and the historic

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Very truly yours,

John J. White

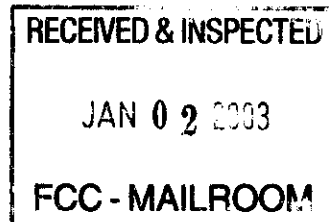
John J. White  
President

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